



Fish Dealer Report



License & Statistics Section, PO Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557

April 2012

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 2011 COMMERCIAL LANDINGS

Commercial fishermen landed 67.5 million pounds of finfish and shellfish in 2011 with a dockside value of \$72.8 million, based on data collected from the N. C. Division of Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Program. The 2011 results reflect a 6 percent drop in harvest compared to landings brought to the docks in 2010. Harvest levels are consistent with the previous five-year average of 68.8 million pounds.

Blue crabs ranked first in the top five species of 2011, with 30 million pounds landed, followed by shrimp (5.1 million pounds), Atlantic croaker (5 million pounds), Atlantic menhaden (3.5 million pounds), and summer flounder (2.8 million pounds).

Comparing the results to 2010 landings, hard blue crabs dropped slightly (3 percent), while peeler and soft crabs increased by 10 and 39 percent respectively.

The shrimp fishery experienced a 14 percent decline in landings. Twenty-two percent fewer shrimp trawl trips and 70 percent fewer skimmer trawl trips were made in 2011. Reports of a very slow white shrimp season in central coastal areas coincide with these decreases.

Menhaden harvest increased significantly from the 1.3 million pounds caught in 2010. Croaker landings dropped 31 percent. Navigational issues at Oregon Inlet likely affected the state's croaker and summer flounder landings. Summer flounder harvest dropped 14 percent from 2010 and 6 percent from the previous five-year average. There were fewer flounder trawl and flynet trips, down 12 and 32 percent respectively. This correlates with

the landings decreases and indicates that some vessels were unable to land in North Carolina due to the condition of Oregon Inlet. Landings of croaker by small mesh gill net actually increased by 44 percent in 2011, but landings by flynets decreased 88 percent.

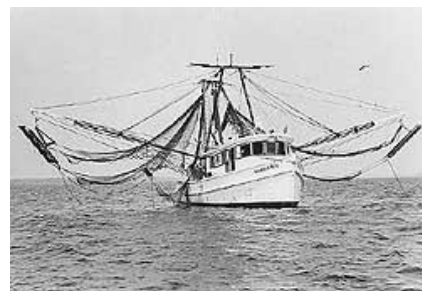
It was a good year for swordfish, with landings up 28 percent from 2010 and 42 percent from the previous five-year average. Spiny dogfish landings edged up 50 percent due to a quota increase. After a five-year low in 2010, landings of spot also rose.

The impacts of closures or changes in quotas on some fisheries were shown in landings of sea bass (down 32 percent), snowy grouper (down 75 percent), tilefish (down 69 percent), and red drum (down 60 percent). Spotted seatrout landings fell 64 percent below 2010 due to a closure spurred by cold stun events in January 2011.

After a banner crop of oysters in 2010 (1 million pounds of meats), fishermen made 31 percent fewer oyster dredge trips and harvested 23 percent fewer oysters in 2011. Despite these decreases, oyster landings were 35 percent higher than the previous five-year average.

For a full listing of pounds and value by species and further information on the preliminary landings results see the 2011 *Annual Fisheries Bulletin*.

The bulletin also contains landings for 2007 to 2010 and a summary of the number of trips by major gears used in N. C.



NEW RULE ON THE HORIZON FOR ELECTRONIC TRIP TICKET REPORTING

If you are a fish dealer licensed to purchase finfish, please take note. The rulemaking process has begun that will require some finfish dealers to file trip tickets electronically. The requirement will only apply to those dealers who average purchasing *50,000 pounds or more of finfish per year over a period of three years*. The capability for dealers to record landings via software on their personal computer and submit it electronically has been in effect since 1995. The division has had its own software package since 2004 and it is available at no charge to licensed dealers. Currently, there are 86 dealers actively reporting their landings data by electronic means. Electronic reporting gives the DMF faster access to landings data, which in turn, speeds up processing to allow timelier management decisions. Public hearings on this new rule will be scheduled.

INCIDENTAL TAKE PERMITS AND THE NEED FOR OBSERVERS

Sea Turtles

Since 1999, the Pamlico Sound large-mesh gill net fishery has been subject to a closure from Sept. 1 through Nov. 30 due to sea turtle interactions. This fishery has been able to continue in limited areas of the sound during this closed period through a series of special permits issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and authorized under Section 10 of the federal Endangered Species Act. A Section 10 Incidental Take Permit, or "ITP", allows for a certain number of protected species to be "taken" before a fishery must close. Each sea turtle species has different limits for takes depending on the status of the populations. An application for a statewide ITP to cover the large mesh gill net fishery has been submitted and is under review.

Atlantic Sturgeon

The Carolina and South Atlantic sturgeon population segments, both of which are prevalent in North Carolina waters, were listed as endangered on April 6. It has been illegal to harvest Atlantic sturgeon in North Carolina coastal waters since 1991 but now that this fish has been listed as endangered, fishermen may be subject to federal fines and penalties if an interaction with a sturgeon occurs. With the recent listing of Atlantic sturgeon as an endangered species, the DMF has applied for another ITP because of the potential impact this listing can have on both commercial and recreational fishing. Fishermen should avoid interactions with these fish until an ITP is secured from NMFS.



Atlantic sturgeon (NOAA Photo)

Observer Program

NMFS requires a certain percentage of observer coverage for any gear covered in an ITP. Data collected through an observer program is essential for fisheries to remain open when fisheries are subject to an ITP. The sea turtle regulations in place currently require a minimum of 7 percent coverage with a goal of 10 percent coverage. If the DMF does not meet the minimum observer coverage requirements, NMFS has the authority to close the fishery. Having observers aboard and increasing the percent coverage will enhance the opportunity to keep the fishery open and increase the number of allowable takes.

In addition to monitoring protected species, the DMF Observer Program collects biological data

used for many aspects of fisheries management. The data collected with onboard observations is vital for many fisheries to remain open.

BLUELINE TILEFISH EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT



In January 2011, federal regulations prohibited the possession of six deepwater snapper-grouper species (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, queen snapper, and silk snapper) in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in depths greater than 240-feet (40-fathoms). The purpose of the closure is to reduce discards of speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

As a result of this closure, the division requested and was granted an Exempted Fishing Permit so commercial fishermen could continue fishing for blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras on a limited basis. To be eligible for a permit, vessels had to show blueline tilefish landings of more than 500 pounds from north of Cape Hatteras in 2009, as verified by the Trip Ticket Program. A maximum of 11 vessels were allowed to participate.

The Exempted Fishing Permit was set to expire when any of the following events occur:

- 100 trips are taken
- 350,000 pounds of blueline tilefish are caught
- 50 fish total of speckled hind or warsaw grouper are caught in any combination
- 30 of any one of the following species are caught: yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, queen snapper or silk snapper
- One year has passed from the start date of the Exempted Fishing Permit
- The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) puts into place actions that will permanently open the fishery

The permit enabled the division to collect data on the age, length, weight and sex of various species caught in the blueline tilefish fishery north of Cape Hatteras. Twenty percent of all trips were covered with an on-board observer.

The 100 trip limit was recently met and the Exempted Fishing Permit has expired. The permit is renewable contingent upon approval from NMFS. The SAFMC is developing an amendment to its snapper-grouper plan to address this closure for the long term.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATES

Shrimp

The Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was up for its five-year review in 2011. The plan development team decided no changes in management strategies were needed, so a revision of the plan has begun. A revision is an abbreviated fisheries management plan process that involves updating the information in the plan, but does not involve setting up an advisory committee. The revised FMP will still be reviewed by the regional committees of the Marine Fisheries Commission. The division anticipates bringing the revised plan to the commission for approval in late 2012.

Spotted Seatrout

The Marine Fisheries Commission gave final approval to a Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan. The plan includes short-term and long-term measures to address overfishing in the spotted seatrout fishery. The short-term measures have already been implemented by proclamation. The long-term measures will go into place in February 2014 unless additional data becomes available before then that indicates reductions are not necessary. The long-term measures will reduce the daily recreational bag limit to three fish per person, implement a December 15 through January 31 recreational closure, reduce the

commercial trip limit to 25 fish and eliminate commercial closures.

Striped Mullet

The striped mullet fishery management plan is currently under review. Work is being done on the stock assessment for the plan. Once finalized, it will be determined whether to proceed with a revision of this plan or an amendment.

State law requires the division to prepare a fishery management plan for adoption by the Marine Fisheries Commission for all commercially and recreationally significant species or fisheries in North Carolina. These plans provide management strategies designed to ensure long-term viability of the fishery. State law also requires the division to review each fishery management plan every five years.

AMERICAN EEL LOGBOOKS

Fishermen who harvest American eel with eel pots must report their catches to the DMF using a logbook reporting system. All fishermen who landed eel with pots in 2011 should be up-to-date on their logbook reporting. Division staff have been working on obtaining delinquent logs. Failure to report eel logs may result in action from Marine Patrol. For information on reporting, or to get a logbook and reporting supplies, contact Roz Camp at (800) 338-7804, ext. 3867.

NCMFC Business Meeting Schedule for the Remainder of 2012

August 22-24: Raleigh area

November 7-9: Sheraton Inn, Atlantic Beach

LICENSE SALES JULY 1, 2011 to PRESENT

Sales to date (as of April 20, 2012) by license type for the 2012 license year. Includes active licenses only. Totals do not include transfers, replacements or voids.

Standard Commercial Fishing License	5,052
Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License	1,079
Commercial Fishing Vessel Registration	8,376
License to Land Flounder from Atlantic Ocean	151
Land or Sell License	70
NC Resident Shellfish License Without SCFL	1,743
Menhaden License Non-Resident Without SCFL	10
Fish Dealer License	765
Spotter Plane License	8
Ocean Pier License	20
Recreational Fishing Tournament License	22
Recreational Commercial Gear License	4,788
Total Licenses For All License Types	22,084

Licenses for fiscal year 2013 (July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013) went on sale April 16 and renewal by mail is available. If you want to avoid the lines at the license office, please use the mail-in process.

New License Card Now Being Issued

The Division began issuing a new credit card-type commercial fishing license in April of this year. The new license card is a more durable and less costly alternative to the previous material that is no longer manufactured. Currently, this new license is only issued for Standard and Retired Commercial Fishing Licenses, but DMF hopes to improve all the various commercial and for-hire licenses in the near future. The card has a planned 5-year lifespan and security decals will be provided each year upon renewal. DMF welcomes feedback on the new license.

The Division of Marine Fisheries is dedicated to ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit of the people of North Carolina.